

HOME CINEMA KITS

INTRODUCTION

Prices of LCD TVs have come crashing down recently, with big 37in models now available for under £500. If you've picked up one of these monster screens, you may have noticed that the built-in stereo speakers don't match up to the big-screen action.

What you need to make your movies go with a bang is a home cinema kit. These consist of a set of five speakers to immerse you in the film, plus a subwoofer to re-create those blockbusting explosions. Many kits also include DVD players with digital HDMI outputs, so if you have a flat-screen TV you should get a better-quality picture as well.

Home cinema kits don't have to be expensive, with prices starting as low as £93. We've gathered nine different kits for you to choose from, so you'll find plenty of practical advice about which is best suited to you and your living room.

Seth Barton

Deputy Reviews Editor



seth@computershopper.co.uk

Want to surround yourself with sound without breaking the bank? We test nine home cinema kits that will put the tinny speakers on your TV set to shame

SOUND CHOICES

Choosing a... Home Cinema Kit

While it's tempting to buy the biggest and loudest home cinema kit you can afford, there are a number of things you should consider before you buy. A home cinema kit will be useless if it doesn't fit in with your current equipment and provide the features and ports you need.

Home cinema kits can vary considerably when it comes to audio and video outputs and inputs. You'll want one that will work with both your TV and any AV sources you want to plug into it, such as a games console, a Freeview or Sky box or a media centre PC.

You should also consider the physical size and appearance of the kit. Some kits have tiny speakers that can be easily hidden away, while others have large main units and powered subwoofers that you'll have to find space for. Read on to work out which kit is best suited to both your AV desires and your living room realities.

IF THE KIT FITS

Home cinema kits come in a number of varieties. The most common consists of a main unit that combines a DVD player, surround-sound decoder and amplifier. The five speakers and subwoofer connect to and are driven by this main unit. Some kits, such as Logitech's Z-5500 and Sony's DAVIS10, have the amplifier built into the

subwoofer unit, with the other speakers being driven from the sub. A smaller control unit is then connected to the subwoofer, usually by a proprietary captive cable.

Finally, there are kits made up of an AV receiver and speaker set. These are separate components that have been bundled together by the manufacturer. The AV receivers look like hi-fi amplifiers, and can be used for that purpose as well. All the speakers are driven from the amplifier, except for the subwoofer, which has its own built-in amp and receives a signal via a phono lead.

A LITTLE OUTPUT

If you've got a new flat-screen TV but still connect your DVD player to it using a SCART lead, you're not getting the best possible picture. All the DVD home cinema kits here, with the exception of JVC'S TH-P3, have either component or HDMI outputs, both of which will give you a better-quality picture. Check your TV's manual to see what kind of inputs it has.

A component connection is superior to SCART because it supports progressive scan. This means that each frame of the movie is transmitted to the TV whole, rather than as two interlaced fields, as happens with a SCART connection. This gives you a crisper image, with clearer motion.





HDMI outputs send a digital signal from the DVD player to the TV and can give a better result than component. Over HDMI the player can upscale the video to HD resolutions such as 720p or 1080i, instead of letting the TV take care of the upscaling. On cheaper LCD TVs the improvements can be significant, but if you have a new TV from a big-brand manufacturer you may find it hard to spot the differences compared to a component input.

If you want your new home cinema kit to work with your existing kit, you'll need to make sure it has the right audio inputs. As well as playing DVDs, your player should be able to accept and output audio from your TV or set-top box. All the units here support Dolby Pro Logic II, so you will get surround sound from many movies and programmes.

If you're using a tuner built into your TV, then a DVD home cinema kit with a bi-directional SCART socket should be able to receive audio from it, although you should check your TV manual to see if this is the case. Alternatively, you could use a phono stereo output on your TV or set-top box to connect to a phono input on the home cinema kit.

If you have devices with digital audio S/PDIF outputs, such as a games console, DVD player or some media centre PCs, then you'll probably want to connect them to your home cinema kit to take advantage of its surround sound. Check

the type of S/PDIF output on your device to see whether it's either optical or coaxial, and make sure you have the corresponding input on your chosen home cinema kit.

SETTING THE SCENE

Whichever kit you choose, you're going to end up with lots of new boxes and wires to fit in your living room. The box (below right) shows the optimal way to set up your new speakers for the best possible effect. This is all fine if your living room is a perfect oblong with a single sofa. But in the real world you'll just have to do the best with what you have.

Speakers should be at ear level when you're sitting down, or higher for the left and right surrounds. You may wish to mount them on the wall, or use a bookshelf if possible. If that's not an option, you'll have to invest in some speaker stands or buy Panasonic's SC-PT850 kit, which comes with floor-standing speakers.

It's also worth considering the aesthetic impact the speakers will have on your living room. You'll need somewhere to hide the big subwoofer, but luckily all the systems here have relatively small satellite speakers. Sony's DVD home cinema system has absolutely tiny speakers that you'd be hard pressed to notice.

Once you've got the speakers in position, you should use the kit's menu system to tweak the levels to match your setup. Some

This month

DVD HOME CINEMA KITS

JVC

TH-P3

Page 94



PHILIPS

HTS3154

Page 94



SAMSUNG

HT-X30

Page 94



PIONEER

DCS-363

Page 95



PANASONIC

SC-PT850

Page 95



SONY

DAVIS10

Page 95



HOME CINEMA KITS

LOGITECH

Z-5500 Digital

Page 96



YAMAHA

AV Package 61

Page 96



DENON

DHT1356XP

Page 96

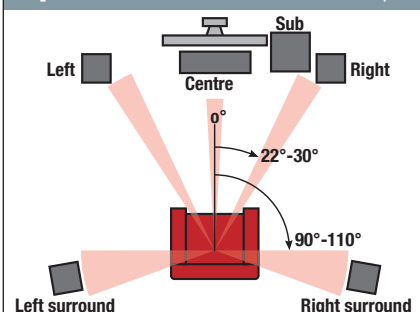


kits come with calibration microphones that do this automatically.

AUDIO-FILE

All the DVD home cinema kits here can play a variety of audio, photo and video file formats. Some have USB ports that let you attach storage devices, or you can burn the files to disc and play them from the optical drive. We've described how well this works in the individual reviews, and each player's supported file formats are listed in the table on page 97.

Speakers The best setup



▲ This is the optimal setup for a 5.1 surround-sound system. The position of your speakers should be as close as possible to this



JVC TH-P3

★★★

£93 inc VAT

From www.digitaldirect.co.uk

JVC's TH-P3 is the cheapest DVD home cinema kit here, though only by one pound. Everything in the box feels a little lightweight for our liking. The subwoofer, like many here, is driven by the main unit rather than having its own amplifier. The satellite speakers are small and square and are only rated at 40W. Unusually, the centre speaker is the same shape, but since it's rated at 100W you shouldn't have any trouble hearing any quiet dialogue.

The speakers and subwoofer have captive speaker wires that connect to spring terminals on the main unit. The only video connector provided is a SCART socket, so there's no progressive scan or upscaled HD video on offer. The SCART socket provides a good picture, although we got a better picture on our LCD TV from the component and HDMI sources on some of the other units. The SCART socket is bi-directional, however, and can therefore receive and output an audio signal from your TV.

One major downside of the TH-P3 is its terrible remote control. It's packed with loads of identically sized tiny buttons, many of which have multiple functions. The labelling isn't clear, either, and we repeatedly struggled to find the correct button.

Although the TH-P3 is supposedly capable of displaying photo and video files from a USB storage device, we couldn't get our test files to work. We managed to play MP3 audio files from the USB drive, however.

Audio quality was reasonable given the kit's low price. It seemed underpowered in the mid-range, with a noticeable gap between the satellites and subwoofer. Surround-sound effects didn't flow from one speaker to the next as much as we'd like, giving a feeling of separate speakers rather than an encompassing sound stage.

The TH-P3 isn't a terrible kit given its very low price. However, its poor remote control and SCART-only video output both count against it. If you're looking for surround sound on a budget, then Philips' HTS3154 is a better choice in every respect.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✗ No S/PDIF input; poor remote
- ✗ SCART output only

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT 1x SCART socket output
PART CODE TH-P3E
DETAILS www.jvc.co.uk



PHILIPS HTS3154

★★★★★

£94 inc VAT

From www.dixons.co.uk

Philips' HTS3154 costs only £1 more than JVC's TH-P3, but you get a lot more for your money. The main unit itself is compact and inoffensive. It's narrower than standard hi-fi components, though, so you won't be able to put it at the bottom of a stack.

The remote control is far better than the JVC's. There are fewer buttons, and these are laid out in a logical and intuitive way. The labelling is also better, with each button's function clearly marked. Further thought has gone into the main unit's interface, with options to dim the LCD and to resume DVD playback from where you previously stopped the movie, even after putting the player into standby mode.

On the rear of the unit is a bi-directional SCART socket. Video quality can be noticeably improved by using the component output instead, which gave us a crisper and more stable image on our LCD TV. The only audio inputs are analogue rather than digital, with stereo phono connectors on the rear and a mini-jack input on the front for connecting an MP3 player.

The HTS3154 managed to play all our MP3, WMA, JPEG and DivX and XviD test files. However, DivX and XviD video dropped frames when played from a USB flash drive. This may be due to the speed of the USB drive, as the files played fine when burnt to a DVD-R.

The tall and angular front and surround speakers have the lowest rated wattage in the group. The system is still fairly loud when turned up, but those without neighbours to consider may prefer Samsung's louder HT-X30 instead. Treble was surprisingly well defined, though the lower mid-range was lacking, resulting in a lack of impact with loud noises such as explosions.

Philips' HTS3154 is the better of the two sub-£100 home cinema kits here, and even has some advantages over the more expensive Samsung HT-X30, such as its bi-directional SCART socket. However, the lack of an S/PDIF input means that you can't digitally connect other devices such as a PC or games console.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Inexpensive
- ✓ Component output
- ✗ No S/PDIF input

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT 1x stereo phono input, 1x SCART socket, 1x component output
PART CODE HTS3154/05
DETAILS www.philips.co.uk



SAMSUNG HT-X30

★★★★★

£159 inc VAT

From www.pixmania.co.uk

Samsung's HT-X30 is the cheapest kit in the group that can accept digital audio from an external source. Its optical S/PDIF input means you can connect a games console, media centre PC or HD-DVD or Blu-ray player. It also has several other useful features.

In addition to the S/PDIF input there are SCART, component and HDMI outputs on the back. The HDMI output will upscale DVDs to 720p or 1080i resolutions, so you will see a marked improvement in picture quality on many LCD TVs. However, the SCART socket isn't bi-directional, so to get the HT-X30 to play your TV's audio you'll need an extra cable to connect the TV's audio output to the unit's stereo phono input.

The HT-X30 looks great. The gloss black main unit is sleek and stylish. All the front ports are tucked away behind a flap and there's a big silver volume control and a dimmable blue LCD screen. The remote is slender and tapered, with well-organised and labelled controls.

The oval speakers are simple but pleasing to look at, and the clip terminals on the rear let you replace the speaker wires, so you could run longer or better-quality wires from the main unit. The speakers are heavier than most here, with two drivers hidden behind the foam grills. They are among the loudest speakers in the group and have some bass, so the frequency gap between the satellites and subwoofer is less pronounced than on the cheaper kits. Pioneer's DCS-363 and the three sound-only kits sound better balanced, though.

The HT-X30 plays a wide variety of video files, but again we found that video played from a USB storage device had a poor frame rate. Photo files are displayed at a maximum resolution of 576p, rather than taking full advantage of the 720p and 1080i HD resolutions available.

The HT-X30 is inexpensive and has plenty of inputs and outputs. It's excellent value for a home cinema kit with a built-in DVD player, and it wins a Best Buy award.

SUMMARY

- ✓ HDMI and component output
- ✓ S/PDIF input
- ✗ No bi-directional SCART socket

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT 1x stereo phono, 1x optical S/PDIF inputs, 1x SCART socket, 1x HDMI, 1x component, 1x composite outputs
PART CODE HT-X30R/XEU
DETAILS www.samsung.co.uk



PIONEER DCS-363

★★★★

£220 inc VAT
From www.askdirect.co.uk

The DCS-363's front panel is a transparent piece of plastic broken only by the silver DVD drive door, USB socket and headphone output. It's an unfussy and stylish design. Its top-mounted controls are also easy to get to, but you won't be able to use them if you need to stack another hi-fi component on top of it.

Like the JVC kit's remote, the DCS-363's has too many similar-sized buttons. They are better spaced and labelled, though. The speakers are compact and cube-shaped, and aren't the most attractive of things to have around your living room. They are rated at 60W, and are easily powerful enough to fill an average size living room with sound.

Audio quality is a step up from the cheaper kits. Music is better balanced between bass, mid-range and treble, and the subwoofer is the best of the non-powered ones here. The main unit does a good job of placing and moving surround-sound effects around the speakers.

One major disadvantage is the lack of S/PDIF inputs, so you won't be able to enjoy digital surround sound from a games console or media centre PC. There are stereo phono inputs and outputs, though, so you can connect the device to a hi-fi amplifier or a source component such as a digital tuner.

The player can upscale DVDs to 720p and 1080i resolutions and output the high-definition signal from the HDMI port. However, there's no component output for those without any spare HDMI ports on their TV. DVDs looked good, with some minor improvements in detail compared to cheaper kits when connected over SCART to our LCD TV.

The DCS-363 can only play back video burnt to disc, not from USB devices. Audio and photo files are easy to browse, but even when we set the unit to output an HD resolution pictures looked blocky and lacked detail.

Pioneer's DCS-363 sounds good and has impressive upscaled DVD playback over HDMI. It's a shame it doesn't have an optical input, though, and it is expensive compared to Samsung's HT-X30.

SUMMARY

- ✓ HDMI output
- ✓ Good audio quality
- ✗ No S/PDIF input

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT 1x stereo phono input, 1x SCART socket, 1x HDMI, 1x composite, 1x stereo phono outputs
PART CODE DCS-363
DETAILS www.pioneer.co.uk



PANASONIC SC-PT850

★★★★

£268 inc VAT
From www.121electricals.com

It's important to have satellite speakers at the right height if you're going to get the best from your home cinema kit. However, if your living room is rather sparse, you may not have anywhere to place all those speakers. If you don't fancy drilling holes in your walls, one alternative is to buy a kit with floor-standing speakers such as Panasonic's SC-PT850.

Each of the tall, slim speakers has its drivers near the top, so they should be around ear height when you're sitting down. They look impressive, but they feel a bit lightweight. The centre speaker is a more traditional design, and the subwoofer isn't powered. Combined they are the most powerful set here, and capable of a truly terrifying volume.

The speakers are reasonably well balanced and made a good job of our test audio tracks. We found the subwoofer disappointing considering its high power rating, as it lacked punch and depth. The overall surround-sound effect wasn't as convincing as that from Pioneer's DCS-363, but the Pioneer's speakers will be harder to position accurately. The SC-PT850 also comes with a calibration microphone to help you set it up precisely.

The main unit is rather ugly, with lots of white text labels and no coherent design. The rear has all the ports you're likely to need, with SCART, component and HDMI outputs. The HDMI ports are able to output resolutions at up to 1080p and will upscale DVDs, so those with the latest high-definition displays are well catered for. Video looked detailed, though not any noticeably better than on the DCS-363.

Like the DCS-363, the SC-PT850 can't play back DivX or XviD files from USB storage devices, so you'll have to burn the files to disc. It's easy to browse audio and video files from a USB drive, and pictures looked detailed.

Panasonic's SC-PT850 home cinema kit has no serious drawbacks and sounds impressive. It's more expensive than the Pioneer and Samsung kits, though, and its price is only justified if you really need the floor-standing speakers.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Floor-standing speakers; good audio quality
- ✓ HDMI and component outputs
- ✗ Quite expensive

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT 1x stereo phono, 1x optical S/PDIF inputs, 1x SCART socket, 1x HDMI, 1x component outputs
PART CODE SC-PT850EB-K
DETAILS www.panasonic.co.uk



SONY DAVIS10

★★★★★

£385 inc VAT
From www.rgbdirect.co.uk



Even after two weeks of testing we still find it hard to get over the size of the DAVIS10's speakers. These miniature marvels can be hidden around your living room easily, and guests will wonder where the sound is coming from.

The speakers do have some disadvantages. They can't play lower mid-range tones, so these have to be picked up by the powered subwoofer and amplifier unit. It was usually impossible to tell which sounds were coming from the sub and not the satellites, but we sometimes found that lower-frequency directional sounds came from the subwoofer rather than the other speakers. Because of this we found it was best to keep the subwoofer in front of us, but we were limited by the 2½m captive cable that connects the DVD unit to the subwoofer. A calibration microphone is provided to get everything set up optimally.

The chunky DVD unit is a beautiful piece of design. Its curved edges, touch-sensitive buttons and slot-loading drive make it the most desirable piece of kit here. The remote is also excellent, with flat buttons that click as you push them. Some commands are only registered on the DVD unit's LCD display rather than onscreen, though, which can be confusing.

The DAVIS10 has no SCART output, so it's certainly not suited for those with CRT TVs. Surprisingly it won't output a resolution of 1080p from its HDMI output either, though picture quality from an upscaled DVD at 720p and 1080i was as good as we've seen.

There are optical and coaxial S/PDIF inputs for plugging in other devices, such as a games console or media centre PC. There's no USB2 port, but you can play DivX and XviD MPEG4 video and MP3 and WMA audio from optical media. A Digital Media port lets you attach Sony-branded accessories like MP3 docks.

Sony's DAVIS10 is far more expensive than any of the other home cinema kits in the group, but if you want surround sound and don't want to see your speakers you won't find any smaller than these.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Tiny satellite speakers
- ✓ HDMI and component output
- ✗ Very expensive; no SCART

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT 1x stereo phono, 1x coaxial S/PDIF, 1x optical S/PDIF inputs, 1x HDMI, 1x component, 1x composite outputs
PART CODE DAVIS10
DETAILS www.sony.co.uk



LOGITECH Z-5500 Digital

★★★★★

£200 inc VAT

From www.pixmania.co.uk



Logitech's THX-certified Z-5500 is the only kit in the group with a triple mini-jack input for connection to a PC sound card. An adaptor lets you connect a standard stereo input, such as from a set-top box. Alongside this are the more common optical and coaxial S/PDIF inputs, so you'll be able to connect any DVD player, games console or PC with an S/PDIF output.

All these inputs fit snugly on the back of the small and stylish control unit, the front of which is dominated by a massive volume control and small LCD panel. A basic remote control is provided, which is all that's necessary as the Z-5500 lacks the video-handling and extensive tweaking options of Yamaha's and Denon's AV receivers.

The control unit connects to the subwoofer and amplifier unit by a captive 2m cable, though this could be extended easily as it's identical to a PC VGA monitor cable. The subwoofer unit is immensely heavy and is capable of the most impressive bass effects in the group.

The satellites connect to, and are driven by, the subwoofer unit. They have removable front grilles and stylish stands, which can be twisted round to act as wall mounts instead. They may look a bit sci-fi for some tastes, but they certainly feel well made.

The speakers sound very bright, with an emphasis on the upper mid-range and treble. Whether you like the bright sound or not is down to personal taste, but it doesn't make the speakers sound unbalanced. The subwoofer is superb and there's enough power in the mid-range to make sure it doesn't dominate the sound. The overall effect is very pleasing, but Denon's DHT1356XP produces arguably more accurate sound.

By keeping things simple Logitech has managed to produce an excellent-value, superb surround-sound speaker kit. The AV receiver kits from Yamaha and Denon have more features, but only the more expensive Denon can better the Z-5500 for audio quality. It's our Best Buy home cinema speaker system.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great-quality audio
- ✓ Thumping bass
- ✓ PC mini-jack audio input

HOME CINEMA KIT 1x coaxial S/PDIF, 1x optical S/PDIF inputs
PART CODE 970115-0403
DETAILS www.logitech.com



YAMAHA AV Package 61

★★★★★

£200 inc VAT

From www.atlantic2u.net

Yamaha's AV Package 61 is one of two kits in the group that are really hi-fi separates packages. They consist of an AV receiver and a 5.1 speaker set. This means you can upgrade the speakers or receiver separately in future.

Even this fairly basic AV receiver has a huge number of ports. Two optical and one coaxial S/PDIF, six phono inputs and a multi-channel input should take care of all your audio-visual equipment. There's also a ¼in headphone jack and 3½mm mini-jack input for MP3 players. A calibration microphone is provided to ensure an easy and accurate setup.

Component and composite video inputs and outputs are supplied, though like most AV receivers there's no SCART option. If you plug other video equipment such as a video game console into the receiver, you can use the Yamaha's remote to switch audio and video at the same time without having to change inputs on your TV. You can also wire up a second pair of stereo speakers for use in another room.

The slender silver speakers don't look very impressive, but they do match the receiver and are reassuringly weighty. Music sounded a little flat, though there was a good balance between bass, mid-range and treble. Surround-sound placement was accurate and our tests showed smooth movement of effects around the soundstage. The Denon and Logitech kits produced a more involving sound, though.

The powered subwoofer isn't quite as impressive as the Z-5500's, but it's still a massive step up from most here. You connect it to the amplifier with a phono lead from the subwoofer output, which means you can place it pretty much anywhere by simply buying a longer cable. Once it was adjusted properly there was a smooth audio transition between the satellite speakers and subwoofer.

The Yamaha kit's audio isn't quite up to the standard of Denon's more expensive DHT1356XP or Logitech's more compact Z-5500. If you'd like to be able to manage several video sources using just one remote, though, it's the home cinema kit to buy.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Component video handling
- ✓ Loads of audio inputs
- ✗ Audio a little flat

HOME CINEMA KIT 3x component, 5x composite, 6x stereo phono, 1x coaxial S/PDIF, 2x optical S/PDIF inputs, 1x component, 1x composite, 2x stereo phono outputs
PART CODE YAMAHA.AV-PACKAGE-61
DETAILS www.yamaha-uk.com



DENON DHT1356XP

★★★★★

£235 inc VAT

From www.hughesdirect.co.uk

Like Yamaha's AV Package 61, Denon's DHT1356XP AV receiver and speaker set is around twice the height of many of the DVD units. It also has a big remote control to match, with buttons for all its functions laid out along its length with plenty of space between them.

It's even better equipped for audio than Yamaha's kit, with two optical and two coaxial S/PDIF and seven stereo phono inputs. Like the Yamaha receiver it supports two sets of stereo speakers, so you can set up a second pair in a different room. The speaker wires attach to binding posts rather than the more usual spring terminals, which ensures that they stay well connected and gives you the option of using chunkier speaker wire if desired.

The DHT1356XP only accepts composite video inputs. Composite video quality is poor, so you're better off plugging your video sources directly into your display. This means you'll need to select video and audio sources separately, which is something an AV receiver is supposed to save you the hassle of doing.

The speakers look stylish, with curved grilles and a glossy finish down each side, and audio quality is excellent. They are the best-balanced of all the speakers in the group, with a neutral sound that is truer to the original soundtrack than the Z-5500's brighter interpretation. Music and dialogue are crisply delivered, and surround sound seems to envelope you rather than coming from individual speakers.

The subwoofer isn't quite up to the bone-shaking theatrics of the Z-5500's, but it's a match for the Yamaha's. Bass effects are well integrated into the rest of the audio, but it takes a little tweaking to get the crossover correct. Note that there's no calibration microphone with this kit, so you'll need to use your ears to get everything set up just right.

Denon's DHT1356XP kit has the best overall audio performance of any here, but we were disappointed by the lack of component video handling. It produces excellent surround sound, so if you don't mind changing video inputs yourself it's a great choice.

SUMMARY

- ✓ Great quality audio
- ✓ Loads of audio inputs
- ✗ Composite video inputs only

HOME CINEMA KIT 4x composite, 7x stereo phono, 2x coaxial S/PDIF, 2x optical S/PDIF inputs, 2x composite, 2x stereo phono outputs
PART CODE DHT1356XP
DETAILS www.denon.co.uk

DVD HOME CINEMA KITS

HOME CINEMA KITS

			★ BEST BUY				★ MOST WANTED		★ BEST BUY	
MANUFACTURER	JVC	PHILIPS	SAMSUNG	PIONEER	PANASONIC	SONY	LOGITECH	YAMAHA	DENON	
Model	TH-P3	HTS3154	HT-X30	DCS-363	SC-PT850	DAVIS10	Z-5500 Digital	AV Package 61	DHT1356XP	
Rating	★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★	★★★★	
CONNECTIONS										
HDMI inputs/outputs	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/1	0/0	0/0	0/0	
Component inputs/outputs	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/0	3/1	0/0	
Output resolutions	PAL (576i)	PAL (576i)	PAL (576i), 720p, 1080i	PAL (576i), 720p, 1080i	PAL (576i), 720p, 1080i, 1080p	PAL (576i), 720p, 1080i	N/A	N/A	PAL (576i)	
SCART sockets	Bi-directional	Output	Output	Output	Output	None	None	None	None	
S-video inputs/outputs	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	
Composite inputs/outputs	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1	0/0	0/1	0/0	5/1	4/2	
Stereo phono inputs/outputs	0/0	1/0	1/0	1/1	1/0	1/0	0/0	6/2	7/2	
Coaxial S/PDIF inputs/outputs	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	0/0	1/0	1/0	1/0	2/0	
Optical S/PDIF inputs/outputs	0/0	0/0	1/0	0/0	1/0	1/0	1/0	2/0	2/0	
Multi-channel input	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	
Headphone output	3½mm	None	None	3½mm	3½mm	None	3½mm	¼in	¼in	
Speaker configuration	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	
Second zone speaker output	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	
Main unit end speaker connection type	Spring terminals	Proprietary	Proprietary	Proprietary	Spring terminals	Proprietary	Spring terminals	Spring terminals and binding post terminals	Binding post terminals	
Speaker end speaker connection type	Captive	Captive	Spring terminals	Spring terminals	Spring terminals	Spring terminals	Spring terminals	Spring terminals	Spring terminals	
Other connections	USB2	USB2, mini-jack stereo input	USB2, mini-jack stereo input	USB2	USB2, calibration mic input/mini-jack stereo input	Calibration mic input, Digital Media port	Mini-jack stereo input, 3x minijack PC inputs	Mini-jack stereo input, subwoofer phono output	Subwoofer phono output	
PLAYBACK										
Supported surround-sound formats	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS, DTS 96/24	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS	Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II, DTS, DTS 96/24, DTS NEO:6	
Optical drive	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	
Region-free	No	Hackable	Hackable	No	No	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Supported playback disc formats	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	DVD, DVD+R, DVD-R, DVD+RW, DVD-RW, DVD+R DL, CD, CD-R, CD-RW	N/A	N/A	N/A
Audio playback formats	MP3, WMA	MP3, WMA	MP3, WMA	MP3, WMA	MP3, WMA	MP3	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Video playback formats	MPEG2, DivX	DivX	DivX, XviD, WMV	DivX	DivX	DivX	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Image viewing formats	JPEG	JPEG	JPEG	JPEG	JPEG	JPEG	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Radio tuner	FM	FM	FM	FM	FM	FM	None	FM	FM	
SPEAKERS										
Speaker configuration	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	5.1	
RMS power output	360W	300W	800W	360W	1,000W	550W	505W	600W	375W	
RMS power centre	100W	75W	133W	60W	250W	50W	69W	100W	75W	
RMS power front	40W	38W	133W	60W	125W	50W	62W	100W	75W	
RMS power surround	40W	38W	133W	60W	125W	50W	62W	100W	75W	
RMS power subwoofer	100W	75W	135W	60W	250W	100W	188W	100W	75W	
Wall mountable	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Centre speaker cable length	3.0m	2.8m	2.9m	4.0m	5.0m	3.0m	4.5m	4.0m	3.0m	
Front speaker cable length	3.0m	2.8m	2.4m	4.0m	5.0m	4.5m	4.5m	4.0m	3.0m	
Surround speaker cable length	8.0m	10.0m	10.0m	10.0m	9.0m	12.0m	7.5m	10.0m	10.0m	
GENERAL										
Accessories provided	Remote control	SCART cable, remote control, FM antenna	Remote control, AV cable	Remote control	Remote control, composite cable	Remote control, AV cable, calibration microphone	Remote control	Remote control	Remote control, phono cable	
Main unit dimensions (WxDxH)	435x308x70mm	360x332x48mm	430x320x60mm	420x332x60mm	415x317x58mm	215x207x105mm	106x203x121mm	435x318x151mm	434x17x147mm	
Subwoofer (WxDxH)	129x337x284mm	131x386x315mm	180x390x320mm	221x390x402mm	153x257x415mm	190x450x450mm	330x381x337mm	200x375x365mm	210x379x353mm	
Centre speaker (WxDxH)	92x96x99mm	240x64x100mm	250x95x90mm	220x100x90mm	270x94x95mm	45x40x55mm	163x124x145mm	300x110x75mm	263x110x84mm	
Front speakers (WxDxH)	92x96x99mm	96x75x198mm	90x95x168mm	100x100x100mm	252x235x1123mm	45x40x55mm	97x134x191mm	72x111x164mm	84x110x189mm	
Surround speakers (WxDxH)	92x96x99mm	96x75x198mm	90x95x168mm	100x100x100mm	252x235x1123mm	45x40x55mm	97x134x191mm	72x111x164mm	84x110x189mm	
BUYING INFORMATION										
Price including VAT	£93	£94	£159	£220	£268	£385	£200	£200	£235	
Warranty	One year RTB	One year RTB	One year RTB	One year RTB	One year RTB	One year RTB	Two years RTB	One year RTB	One year RTB	
Supplier	www.digitaldirect.co.uk	www.dixons.co.uk	www.pixmania.co.uk	www.askdirect.co.uk	www.121electricals.com	www.rgbdirect.co.uk	www.pixmania.co.uk	www.atlantic2u.net	www.hughesdirect.co.uk	
Details	www.jvc.co.uk	www.philips.co.uk	www.samsung.co.uk	www.pioneer.co.uk	www.panasonic.co.uk	www.sony.co.uk	www.logitech.com	www.yamaha-uk.com	www.denon.co.uk	
Part code	TH-P3E	HTS3154/05	HT-X30R/XEU	DCS-363	SC-PT850EB-K	DAVIS10	970115-0403	YAMAHA-AV-PACKAGE-61	DHT1356XP	

Labs verdict Home cinema kits

Any of the home cinema kits in this month's Labs will sound better than your TV's speakers when you're watching a DVD, but we've finally settled on three that stand out from the rest.

The cheaper DVD kits provide an inexpensive way of adding surround sound to your home entertainment setup. If you want to save some money and don't need an HDMI connection, then Philips' HTS3154 is a good buy. Our favourite DVD kit, though, is Samsung's HT-X30. This kit gives you impressive audio quality and an upscaling

DVD player for just £159, and there's even an optical S/PDIF input for connecting a games console or media centre PC.

It was much tougher making a decision about the non-DVD kits. In the end, Logitech's Z-5500 just took the top award thanks to its low price and earth-shaking subwoofer. Even so, the AV receiver kits from Yamaha and Denon both have their advantages, and if you're serious about surround sound but short on money, either of these would make a good AV receiver starter system. **CE**

DVD HOME CINEMA KIT

SAMSUNG
HT-X30
★★★★★

SONY
DAVIS10
★★★★★

HOME CINEMA KIT

LOGITECH
Z-5500 Digital
★★★★★

